

Message Text

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51

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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P R 261649Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3081

DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

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E.O. 11652: N/A DECON 2-26-76

TAGS: PINS LE

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN SIDON

1. ON MORNING FEB 26, LEFTIST-ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATION BY FISHERMEN IN SOUTHERN COASTAL TOWN OF SIDON ERUPTED INTO GENERAL SHOOTING-MATCH BETWEEN LEBANESE ARMY AND POLICE ON ONE HAND AND "ARMED ELEMENTS" ON THE OTHER. THREE LEBANESE PERSONNEL WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED AND FOUR WOUNDED, PLUS SOME 20-25 CIVILIANS WOUNDED AS WELL. INFORMATION WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DEVELOP THUS FAR INDICATES THAT FISHERMEN WERE MOBILIZED BY LOCAL LEFTIST GROUPS, PARTICULARLY FOLLOWERS OF SIDONIAN EX-DEPUTY MAAROUF SAAD, TO PROTEST GOL DECISION TO AWARD FISHING CONCESSION TO COMPANY BACKED BY FORMER

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PRESIDENT CAMILLE CHAMOUN. WHEN DEMONSTRATORS BESIEGED SIDEON'S

CITY HALL AT APPROXIMATELY 0930 HOURS LOCAL, SHOOTING REPORTEDLY ERUPTED, NEARBY LEBANESE ARMY UNITS WERE ORDERED TO INTERVENE, AND GENERAL MELEE DEVELOPED WHICH LASTED FOR OVER AN HOUR BETWEEN ARMY, DEMONSTRATORS AND "ARMED ELEMENTS" POSITIONED ON ROOFTOPS IN SIDON'S OLD QUARTER. MAAROUF SAAD APPARENTLY WAS CUT DOWN BY ARMY FIRE (HE REPORTEDLY IS IN CRITICAL CONDITION IN HOSPITAL), AND JEEPLOAD OF LEBANESE SOLDIERS WAS REPORTEDLY CAUGHT IN SUBSEQUENT CROSS-FIRE. AS OF 1600 HOURS LOCAL, ARMY HAD MANAGED TO ISOLATE SIDON BY MEANS OF ROADBLOCKS ESTABLISHED ON ARTERIES LEADING INTO TOWN, AND TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS WITH TOWN HAD BEEN CUT. UNTSO AND UNRWA PERSONNEL WHO WERE FORCED TO DETOUR AROUND SIDON AT 1500 HOURS LOCAL REPORT LARGE NUMBERS OF ARMED FEDAYEEN IN EVIDENCE AND CONTINUING EXCHANGES OF SMALL ARMS FIRE AUDIBLE IN DIRECTION OF TOWN'S CENTER.

2. ABOVE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO HAVE REPERCUSSIONS ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON. INTERNAL SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE PRIVATELY INFORMED US THAT SHOOTING INCIDENTS HAVE ERUPTED IN BOTH TRIPOLI AND TYRE (LATTER BEING SCENE OF RECENT SHOOTING INCIDENT BETWEEN SAIQA FEDAYEEN AND FOLLOWERS OF MAYOR ABDUL RAHMAN KHALIL--SEE FBIS JN261011). IN ADDITION, WE UNDERSTAND THAT MASSIVE PROTEST DEMONSTRATION IS BEING ORGANIZED IN BEIRUT FOR MORNING FEB 27.

3. COMMENT: WE HAVE OCCASION TO REPORT IN PAST THAT SIDON, PARTICULARLY ITS MEDIEVAL QUARTER, IS INFESTED NOT ONLY BY ARMED LEBANESE LEFTIST ELEMENTS (FOLLOWERS OF MAAROUF SAAD) BUT ALSO BY VARIOUS FEDAYEEN ELEMENTS WITH WHOM LEFTISTS HAVE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP. (FEDAYEEN PROBABLY HAVE ENOUGH MUNITIONS--INCLUDING SAM-7'S AT LAST REPORT--STORED IN CITY'S CRUMBLING CRUSADER CITADEL TO BLOW IT SKY HIGH.) WOULD APPEAR THAT ARMY'S INTERVENTION AGAINST DEMONSTRATORS THIS MORNING TOUCHED SENSITIVE LEFTIST-FEDAYEEN NERVES, WITH RESULT THAT MATTERS GOT QUICKLY OUT OF HAND. ON OTHER HAND, WE HAVE PICKED UP UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT FISHERMAN'S DEMONSTRATION WAS ONLY A RUSE MOUNTED BY "REJECTIONIST" FEDAYEEN ELEMENTS AND THEIR SIDONIAN LEFTIST ALLIES TO DRAW LEBANESE ARMY INTO CONFLICT WITH FEDAYEEN UNITS IN SIDON AND ELSEWHERE AND THEREBY EMBARRASS PLO LEADERSHIP IN ITS RELATIONS WITH GOL. ONE FACTOR WHICH TENDS SUPPORT THIS THEORY IS EVIDENCE THAT "ARMED ELEMENTS" ON SIDON'S ROOFTOPS MAY HAVE BEEN POSITIONED THERE
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PRIOR TO THIS MORNING'S DEMONSTRATION.

4. WILL REPORT ADDITIONAL INFO AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE.
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